

Leaders from diverse fields assembled

in Anderson Park in Aspen, Colo., during a conference, “Toward a New Consciousness: Creating a Society in Harmony With Nature,” convened by the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies last October. The conference focused on examining the values and worldviews underlying our relationship with the natural world and encouraging affluent society to embrace an ethic of sustainability. *See story on page 12.*



photo by Richard Shock



Growing Concerns About the Environment Raise Hope of a New Public Consciousness

Editor's Note: What follows is an edited excerpt from the forthcoming report, "Toward a New Consciousness: Creating a Society in Harmony With Nature," which is based on a conference convened by the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies in Aspen, Colo., in October 2007. The report will be published by the F&ES Publication Series and available at www.yale.edu/environment/publications. In addition, a book of essays edited by conference co-chair Stephen Kellert is forthcoming.

The conference began with the recognition that our world, our only habitat, is a biotic system under such stress that it threatens to fail in fundamental and irreversible ways. Global climate change, biodiversity extinctions, deforestation, water shortages and many other compounding stresses have created a truly global environmental crisis. Major changes are now required to stabilize and restore the functional integrity of natural systems around the world. Meanwhile, although these environmental facts have been extensively detailed by the scientific community and debated by some within policy and government, they have not yet captured the full attention of the public or sufficiently altered society's behavior toward the natural world. A modest number of people know a great deal about these unfolding tragedies—the nature of the threat, what is driving it, what can be done to change course before the impacts become irreversible—but their messages have difficulty overcoming public apathy, political denial or entrenched opposition. We need to understand this collective failure. In particular, we must critically

examine the values and worldviews underlying our current relationship with the natural world and identify means by which we can promote a shift in these deepest wellsprings of human behavior.

To pursue these issues, the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies convened over 60 leaders in the natural and social sciences, philosophy, communications, education, religion, public policy, business, the creative arts and the humanities. The participants were divided by background and expertise into six broad domains: Business; Communication; the Humanities; Policy; Science; and Social Transformation (philanthropy and non-governmental organizations). They were asked to identify values prevalent within their own domain that contribute to the global environmental crisis, followed by a diagnosis of ecologically dysfunctional values and worldviews prevalent in society. The groups then suggested ways to overcome these obstacles.

"For a long, long time the environmental community has been running on the original fuel from the 1970s. We felt then that if we put in place a well-thought-out,





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photos by Richard Shock

1) David Grant, president and CEO, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation; Dahvi Wilson '07, conference rapporteur; Michel Gelobter, president, Redefining Progress.

2) Michel Gelobter; Dean Gus Speth, conference co-chair; Jonathan Rose, president, Jonathan Rose Companies, and member of F&ES Leadership Council.

3) Pavan Sukhdev, managing director and head of the Global Markets Division, Deutsche Bank; Christy Brown, co-founder and past president, Center for Interfaith Relations; Jonathan Rose; Howell Ferguson, chair and CEO, Lykes Bros., and member of F&ES Leadership Council.

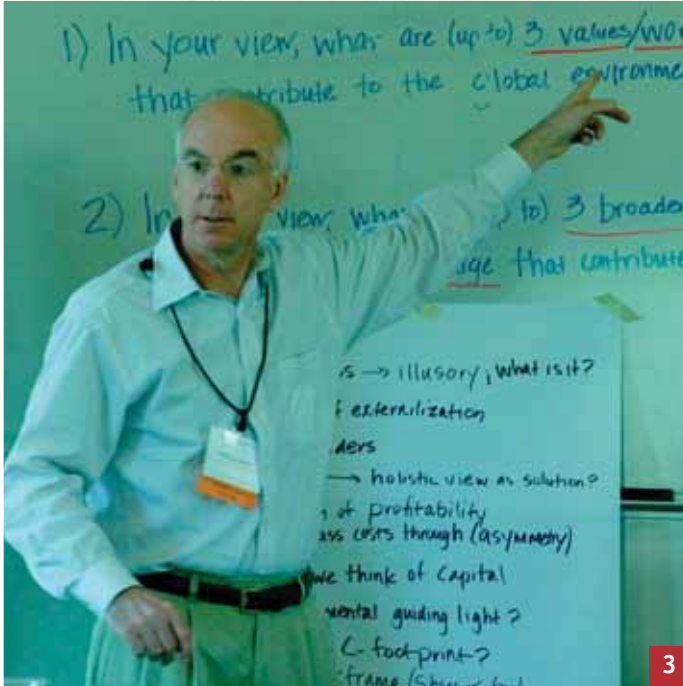
4) Anthony Leiserowitz, director, Yale Project on Climate Change; Theodore Roosevelt IV, managing director and chair of the Council on Climate Change, Lehman Brothers.

5) Stephen Kellert, Tweedy Ordway Professor of Social Ecology and conference co-chair.

6) Juliet Schor, professor of sociology, Boston College; Julia Marton-Lefèvre, director general, International Union for Conservation of Nature; Pavan Sukhdev; Michael Lerner, co-founder and president, Commonweal.

well-planned, economically sound proposal for the private sector, accompanied by a little lobbying and litigating, we could get the end result we sought. Nothing major was required in terms of people's values or lifestyles," said Dean Gus Speth. "What we have come to realize is that if we are going to deal with environmental challenges on the scale needed, we need a profound change of values leading to major behavioral change."

Kathleen Dean Moore, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Oregon State University, said, "People who have a superficial relationship with their environment are hungry for something, but they don't know what they hunger for. There's a national loneliness—a grief over losses



photos by Richard Shock

in personal time and a lack of connection to others and to sources of renewal.”

At the same time, public opinion polls around the world show that many people are growing increasingly worried about the state of the environment, according to Anthony Leiserowitz, a conference organizer, survey researcher and director of the Yale Project on Climate Change. “People want their leaders to act, and say they are willing to change their own behavior, at least to a small degree.”

In another hopeful sign, the world’s major religions are taking significant steps to confront the environmental crisis. Mary Evelyn Tucker, a conference organizer and religious scholar, said, “Religious spirituality,

ritual and scripture are sources of immense cultural power with the potential to effect large-scale changes in environmental values, attitudes and behavior.” Many conference participants expressed hope that the world is heading toward a cultural tipping point or, in Dean Speth’s words, “the rise of a new consciousness.”

“Living in harmony with nature is not a sacrifice or an act of selfless altruism. It is a forceful affirmation of an ancient aspiration for fulfillment and even happiness,” said Stephen Kellert, Ph.D. ’71, conference co-chair and Tweedy Ordway Professor of Social Ecology.

A variety of initiatives to help catalyze a shift toward a more ecologically sustain-

able relationship with the natural world were proposed at the conference, including the need to:

Develop new narratives that illustrate the self-destructive trends in the current relationship between human beings and the natural world, and envision alternative, sustainable pathways of human development. These new narratives need to:

- Raise fundamental questions: How should individuals and societies measure success—higher incomes, growing GDP, greater material consumption? How much is enough? What constitutes “quality of life”? What truly makes individuals happy?

1) Humanities working group, clockwise: Dianne Dumanoski, back to the camera, environmental journalist; John Grim, co-director, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology; J. Baird Callicott, professor of philosophy and religion, University of North Texas; Mary Evelyn Tucker, chair of the humanities working group and co-director, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology; Rachel Holmes '08, joint M.E.M. and M.Div. candidate; Eugenie Gentry, F&ES director of development; Andrew Mackie '08; Christy Brown, co-founder and past president, Center for Interfaith Relations; Kathleen Dean Moore, professor of philosophy, Oregon State University.

2) Paul Raskin, president, Tellus Institute, and chair of the policy working group; Peter Brown, professor of geography and natural resource sciences, McGill University.

3) William Staudt, managing partner, Environmental Capital Partners, and chair of the business working group.

4) Juliet Schor, professor of sociology, Boston College; Carl Safina, co-founder and president, Blue Ocean Institute.

The economy and markets are human constructs, human tools—but to what ends? What means are appropriate, ethical and acceptable to achieve our individual and social aims?

- Depict the links between the global environmental crisis, consumption patterns and lifestyle choices, such as quality of life, hours worked, leisure and family time, food choices, relationships, health, security and faith.
- Re-envision “the good life” while embracing diversity, recognizing pluralism and allowing multiple visions. There is no single master narrative that fits all people, all places and all circumstances.
- Seek to alter the trajectory of ever-greater material consumption. Social psychologists have demonstrated that people who voluntarily simplify their lives are happier

than others in affluent society. These individuals have shifted their focus from the acquisition of more and more things to the goals of self-acceptance, strong relationships with friends and family and community engagement or, as Clive Hamilton, a conference participant, put it: from “lives of riches to rich lives.” This story puts a different spin on traditional environmental arguments, because it does not depend on expert and scientific descriptions of the state of the world to motivate change. Instead, it works at the deeper psychological level of human desire, aspiration and motivation.

- Embed the human story in a deeper understanding of the human relationship to nature—the Universe Story. A deep understanding of modern cosmology places human beings within the grand narrative of the universe, from the Big Bang to the formation of galaxies, the coalescing of Earth and the solar system, and the origins and evolution of life. This narrative reminds us that human beings are not separate from nature—we emerged from it. We are the descendants of a vast, complex, terrifying and beautiful universe, inhabitants of an incredibly precious planetary home and genetically kin, literally, to all other life on Earth.

Conduct Scientific Research on the Role of Values in Behavior

We currently lack fundamental knowledge about the role of human values and attitudes in sustainable and unsustainable behavior. To address this critical knowledge gap, many have called for a Millennium Assessment of Human Behavior—an international research effort to identify, measure and explain global trends in sustainability values, attitudes and behaviors. We need to understand, through rigorous empirical studies, the role core values play in human behavior. Which values matter most? How do values and worldviews differ around the world, and how do they influence different

cultural trajectories of development and consumption? What barriers stand between professed values and actual behavior?

Similarly, we need empirical research on human well-being. What factors drive not only human health, but happiness and fulfillment? What implications do these factors have for the way our societies and economies are currently structured? What are their ecological implications? How can they be used to promote ecological sustainability? How are human and ecological well-being linked and mutually supportive?

Prepare for the Opportunities Inherent in Future Crises

We need to be prepared to act when crises occur. Thomas Homer-Dixon has written about opportunity in crisis in his book, *The Upside of Down*. Crises like Three Mile Island and 9/11 resulted in rapid and fundamental shifts in public priorities and institutions. As global environmental conditions continue to deteriorate, there will be inevitable surprises, shocks and disasters. How can leaders be prepared not only to better respond to the damage and destruction of these events, but also to take advantage of these teachable moments? The policy community needs to prepare for future crises by creating institutions, systems and roadmaps for change, so that negative responses, such as authoritarianism, do not seize the day.

Reconnect People and Nature

A movement to bring agriculture and a land ethic back to the city is quietly building in the form of Community Supported Agriculture programs, farmers' markets, efforts to source school lunches locally and convert abandoned properties and brownfields into community gardens, etc. A concerted effort is needed to amplify these innovations and explore other ways of reconnecting people to nature, especially within urban settings. ■